

# **The Seven Keys To Successful Technology Personnel Interviews**

Locating and hiring an ideal candidate in the IT industry is a frustrating practice. For every advertised position, hiring managers receive hundreds of resumes that are full of trendy buzz words. Applicants claim that they have been there and done that. With good reason, companies are skeptical about the skills and competencies that they come across on IT resumes. With so many technologies existing today, how can a hiring manager design a selection system which ensures that the best candidates are selected?

Here are seven key elements to help you develop a reliable framework for interviewing and hiring technical staff that may be implement immediately:

## **1. Describe the position accurately**

Spend a few minutes to think about the position that needs to be filled. While it is easy to search the Internet for common phrases describing the position and then use them to draft the job, it is much better to describe the functions you actually need. Do not adopt generic terms that other departments rely on. A generic job description attracts generic people. An accurate job description will show applicants that you know what you are looking for, and are determined to find the right candidate.

## **2. Skip IQ questions**

While they may not be legal in all situations, they are actually a poor test in deciding upon the best candidate. Just because someone does well on these tests does not mean they can fit into your team, be responsible and accountable, and manage their time. A good score on an IQ test does not make one a potentially contributing member to the organization. Some organizations use modified IQ tests that are similar in their purpose and end result. Do not use them and do not use any tricky questions that have nothing to do with the way the candidate will fit into the organization. Google may be able to get away with it. They also have unlimited resources and can interview a thousand people when seeking to hire only one.

## **3. Skip phone interviews**

If possible, skip phone interviews and seek an in-person interview right away. Interviewing over the phone does not give you enough information about the candidate to decide if he or she should come for an in-person interview. It is also not fair to the candidate - they may be driving or otherwise distracted. Furthermore, people behave differently when they speak over the phone and when they are sitting in front of you. An acceptable compromise may be to set up a Skype conference. However, an in-person interview is preferred – you can tell a lot about someone from their handshake and body language.

#### **4. Take it easy with technical questions**

You will need to ask some technical questions related to the job. Asking both simple and more complex questions will give you an idea of a candidate's technical knowledge. Look for answers that make it clear the person understands the concepts and can think freely under pressure. Do not focus on memorization questions, like asking for syntax of a command or exact usage of a programming function. No one can remember all the details, and such information can be easily referenced from systems administration and programming manuals. Preferably, ask the person to describe how they would handle a particular situation involving both technology and people. What steps would they take to solve a particular problem? It is important that the candidate knows how to approach the problem, which questions to ask, and where to look for tools that will help him or her solve the problem.

#### **4. Advise that if they do not know the question to concede with an "I do not know"**

Make it clear at the beginning of the interview that if the candidate does not know the answer to the question that that is expected and acceptable. No one is presumed to know all the answers. They should explain why they are not familiar with the subject in question, and let you move on to the next question. It is often clear when someone does not know the answer and there is no need to keep guessing. Additionally, knowing when to say "I do not know" is important. You are looking for someone who is confident in their abilities. Some people are unable to say the words, and will try to talk their way around the question. A person who avoids giving straightforward answers is not someone you want on your team.

#### **5. Find a way to cut the interview short**

There will be situations when it is obvious, after as little as 10 minutes, that a candidate is not a good fit for the position. In such a case, it makes sense to cut the interview short. Rather than going down the long list of remaining questions in spite of the candidate not being able to answer most of them, it is best to thank the candidate for their time and let them go. If there is a team of interviewers in the room, you can come up with a secret code word that everyone knows and can use to end the interview. For example, someone can say, "We should have invited George as well." If everyone agrees, the interview can end. This gives everyone a chance to disagree and continue the interview, accordingly.

#### **6. Ask behavioral questions**

To get a sense of the candidate's character, learn their preferences, and get an idea if he or she will be a good fit for your organization, ask questions like, "What is your favorite \_\_\_?" For example, when interviewing a developer, ask what their favorite programming language is and whether they prefer writing documentation as they write software, or once they are finished with the program. You are hiring a human, not a robot; you want to learn whether they will feel comfortable in your environment. How they integrate into your team and organization is more

important than anything else, including technical skills. You will also become aware of the level of their passion. If they have strong opinions about a particular subject, explore it deeper. Learn what makes them tick. You want people who care about their work and are passionate and proud of it.

## **7. Ask situational questions**

An important part of everyday teamwork is how people react to different situations. By describing a situation and asking how a candidate would approach it, you will get an idea of how they think. Ask for a description of steps they would take to resolve the problem. Make it interactive, creating various scenarios and leading them in different directions. Apply the process to both technical and non-technical questions. In technical questions, you should seek logic in addition to the knowledge of technologies and common sense. In non-technical questions, look for emotional intelligence skills like self-management and social awareness.

### **Balance is key**

There are a lot of charlatans in the IT industry, and companies today are skeptical about finding and hiring the right candidates. There are different approaches to interviewing for technical positions. There is an industry focus on asking a technical person technical questions. Some employers go as far as asking interviewees to demonstrate their knowledge by using a provided computer.

Give candidates a chance to ask you questions as well. If they will need to be a part of on-call rotation, or due to a corporate policy they are not allowed to telecommute, let them know. You want them to be sure they are making the right choice by joining your organization. Otherwise, soon after they start working and realize the situation is not as it described, they will start looking for another job.

Some people are better suited for startups, and others feel more comfortable in a more corporate environment like a large financial or insurance organization. Someone who needs an agile, startup environment to thrive in should not be employed in a large corporation. They will get frustrated by the organizational silos and red tape. On the same token, avoid hiring a corporate employee into a small organization. They will be unable to keep up and will create project delays.

Do not focus merely on the candidate's technical knowledge. Look for passion, curiosity and willingness to learn. In addition to possessing technical knowledge, it is important that the new person fits into your team. They need to be able to get along with people and communicate well. They need to maintain values akin to your organization's ideals. They must be open-minded, responsible, accountable and honest. Technical skills are important, but so are "soft" skills. It is challenging to work with someone with an attitude problem. You are seeking someone who is both technically sound and able to interact with others while working collectively and collaboratively. Balance is key.